



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

News From The Michigan Democratic Party

Thursday, August 29, 2024

Contact: press@michigandems.com

NEW: Mike Rogers Vows to Fight Drug War, but Urged Opioid Access in Congress [Bridge Michigan]

Bridge Michigan: Rogers called himself a “[champion](#)” of the opioids industry, “[received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the same drug companies that now are paying billions of dollars in national opioid settlements for their roles in causing the epidemic.](#)”

LANSING — A bombshell new report from Bridge Michigan outlines Mike Rogers’ record as a “[leading advocate for greater access to pain medications, which are typically variations of opioids](#)” in Congress, as “[prescriptions soared during that decade, but so did addiction and deaths, as the nation tumbled into a crushing epidemic it is still battling today.](#)”

Rogers acknowledged that “[drug companies considered him ‘a champion’ of their industry,](#)” and he “[received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the same drug companies that now are paying billions of dollars in national opioid settlements for their roles in causing the epidemic.](#)”

Rogers’ “[support of the drug industry was notable enough that he is referenced in at least one book about the opioid crisis, as well as multiple newspaper retrospectives of the epidemic.](#)”

Read Bridge Michigan’s reporting on Rogers’ “[decade of advocacy](#)” to “[boost opioid prescriptions](#)” as “[the nation tumbled into a crushing epidemic it is still battling today.](#)”

[Bridge Michigan](#): Mike Rogers vows to fight drug war, but urged opioid access in Congress

- *In September 2003, second-term Michigan U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers held a press conference in Washington to promote a bill he’d introduced. The National Pain Care*

Policy Act, he said, would address “the largest significant health problem facing America.”

- ***It would be the beginning of a decade of advocacy by the Livingston County politician to boost opioid prescriptions, with a goal to “extend accessibility (of pain medications) to more and more Americans suffering from chronic pain.”***
- ***Prescriptions soared during that decade, but so did addiction and deaths, as the nation tumbled into a crushing epidemic it is still battling today.***
- ***Rogers’ home state wasn’t spared, with 27,000 people dying from opioids since 2000, the equivalent of the city of Hamtramck becoming a cemetery. Since 2021, one Michigander has died every four hours from an opioid overdose.***
- ***Absent from his campaign, though, is acknowledgement of his record on opioid-related issues when he last served in Washington.***
- ***A Bridge Michigan investigation revealed that while in Congress from 2001-2015, Rogers was a leading advocate for greater access to pain medications, which are typically variations of opioids. He received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the same drug companies that now are paying billions of dollars in national opioid settlements for their roles in causing the epidemic.***
- ***Yet Rogers’ support of the drug industry was notable enough that he is referenced in at least one book about the opioid crisis, as well as multiple newspaper retrospectives of the epidemic. Rogers acknowledged in 2006 that drug companies considered him “a champion” of their industry.***
- ***What lessons can be learned from the action – or inaction – of Congress 20 years ago matters to the tens of thousands of Michigan families who’ve been torn apart by opioid addiction. And experts say Rogers, who wants to be Michigan’s next U.S. senator, could have done more in his role to temper the growing epidemic.***
- ***“Congress was asleep at the wheel,” said Jonathan Stoltman, director of the Michigan-based Opioid Policy Institute, which tracks opioid settlement fund spending. “Mike Rogers contributed to the crisis.”***
- ***Bridge has published more than three dozen articles this year chronicling the opioid epidemic and critical decisions Michigan leaders must make about how to use \$1.6 billion in lawsuit settlement funds from pharmacies, manufacturers and distributors deemed partly responsible for the crisis.***
- ***Many of the people now in recovery who shared their stories with Bridge first became addicted through opioid prescriptions.***
- ***For example, Jolene Fassett’s descent into addiction began with an opioid prescription for pain given to her in 2004, when she was 18. “It was the time when they were pushing them (opioids),” she told Bridge in July.***

- Opioid prescriptions skyrocketed in the 2000s, when drug companies made a concerted effort to make pain elimination a medical priority. By 2011, opioids were the most commonly prescribed drug in America, more than antibiotics and high-cholesterol medications.
- Some of those prescriptions led to addictions. For example, 45 percent of those who use heroin began with prescription opioids, according to the American Medical Association.
- **During that decade, Rogers was one of Congress' leading advocates for increased access to pain care.** In an examination of bill proposals, news releases, legislative updates, campaign finance records and articles written at the time, Bridge found:
 - Rogers introduced the National Pain Care Policy Act in 2003, and again in 2005, and was co-sponsor of the same act in other years. Rogers' bills and those he co-sponsored included a range of mandates, from developing a pain care initiative for veterans, to assuring Medicare and Tricare (the health care plan for active-duty military) covered pain meds. It also would permit the federal government to offer grants to educate doctors on pain and palliative care. **The bills did not include penalties for over-prescribing.**
 - Though it was early in the epidemic, addiction issues connected to new drugs like Oxycontin were no secret. The first lawsuit against opioid manufacturers was filed in 2000 in West Virginia, and the U.S. General Accounting Office released a report on oxycontin abuse in 2003, the year Rogers introduced his first pain bill.
 - **According to an investigation by the Associated Press and the Center for Public Integrity, Rogers campaign and leadership accounts received at least \$310,000 in contributions from groups tied to the pharmaceutical industry between 2006-2015. Rogers explained the donations in 2016 by saying that, "I think they said, 'This guy is a champion, he's doing something we believe in and we want to support a guy like that.'"**
 - **Rogers received \$226,000 in donations from companies that are now paying Michigan and other states in settlements over their roles in the opioid crisis, including Johnson & Johnson, AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson. You can see the totals [here](#) and [here](#).**
 - **He received \$162,000 from seven opioid distributors that supplied 83 percent of all prescription opioids to Michigan between 2006 and 2019, according to a Washington Post report.**
 - But in Rogers' responses to Bridge, the former congressman declined to say whether Congress played a role in the crisis, putting the onus only on doctors and the Drug Enforcement Agency.
 - **Notably, he did not place blame on the drug companies.**
 - **What separates Rogers from other policymakers at the time, according to his critics, was his close ties to pain foundations that were bankrolled by drug**

companies trying to increase sales of pain pills like Oxycontin. For example:

- The American Pain Society took part in Rogers' first press conference about his National Pain Care Policy Act in 2003. That group was later forced to close after disclosures of its financial ties to drug companies and its role in encouraging opioid prescriptions.
- In 2006, a forum sponsored by the Pain Care Forum, titled "The Epidemic of Pain" asked for support for Rogers' bills. Though doctors had been raising warning flags about opioid prescriptions for years, the briefing materials at the forum included the statement: "Appropriate use of opioid medications like oxycodone is safe and effective and unlikely to cause addiction to people who are under the care of a doctor and who have no history of substance abuse." That's now known not to be true. The Pain Care Forum was financially tied to Purdue Pharma, the maker of Oxycontin, and was labeled by critics as an "echo chamber" for the drug companies
- A 2020 congressional bipartisan report on the history of the opioid epidemic noted that Purdue Pharma donated \$3.6 million to another group called the American Pain Foundation, which supported Rogers' bills. That foundation shut down in 2012 in wake of a Senate investigation into its ties to drug manufacturers.
- Chris McGreal is a British journalist and author of a book on the history of the opioid epidemic, "American Overdose: The Opioid Tragedy in Three Acts." **That book refers to Rogers as "among the principal beneficiaries of pharma's largesse."**
- In the 2000s and continuing today, there are three times more drug company lobbyists on Capitol Hill than members of Congress. Those lobbyists steered the debate from controlling opioids to assuring people in pain had access to them, McGreal told Bridge.
- With tenfold more people dying of opioid overdoses in Michigan than in the year 2000, McGreal doubts that lessons have been learned.
- "Obviously there is a place for these drugs, they will be prescribed," McGreal said. "But America is the only country that prescribes them in this way (so frequently).
- "My sense is this whole thing could happen again."

###